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**STATEMENT OF CHAIRMAN MIKE BILIRAKIS
SUBCOMMITTEE ON HEALTH AND THE ENVIRONMENT
COMMITTEE ON COMMERCE**

**HEARING ON MEDICARE PREVENTIVE BENEFITS
APRIL 11, 1997**

TODAY, I AM PLEASED TO CONVENE THIS HEARING ON PREVENTIVE HEALTH BENEFITS IN THE MEDICARE PROGRAM. WE HAVE A NUMBER OF WITNESSES WHO WILL TESTIFY ON THE IMPORTANCE OF PREVENTIVE BENEFITS. WE ARE GRATEFUL THAT ALL OF YOU COULD JOIN US TODAY.

WE ARE ALSO HONORED TO HAVE AS A WITNESS THE SPEAKER OF THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES, NEWT GINGRICH. NEWT HAS LONG BEEN AN ADVOCATE FOR DIABETES PATIENTS AND THEIR FAMILIES. MR. SPEAKER, WE APPRECIATE YOUR TAKING THE TIME TO JOIN US THIS MORNING.

PREVENTIVE BENEFITS REFER TO MEDICAL TESTS AND SCREENING FOR MEDICARE BENEFICIARIES. THESE TESTS ARE DESIGNED TO DETECT HEALTH RISKS AT AN EARLY STAGE OF A DISEASE. THE HOPE IS THAT IF WE CAN DIAGNOSE THESE CONDITIONS IN A TIMELY MANNER, WE CAN IMPROVE THE QUALITY OF LIFE FOR INDIVIDUALS. ADDITIONALLY, WE ARE ALSO AVOIDING THE MORE COSTLY CARE OF SERIOUS CONDITIONS. AS THE OLD SAYING GOES, "AN OUNCE OF PREVENTION IS WORTH A POUND OF CURE."

TODAY, WE WILL BE DISCUSSING PREVENTION EXAMINATIONS FOR SEVERAL LIFE THREATENING DISEASES.

A NUMBER OF OUR WITNESSES WILL FOCUS ON DIABETES. MY INTEREST IN DIABETES STEMS NOT ONLY FROM THE FACT THAT I HAVE HAD FAMILY MEMBERS AFFLICTED BY THIS DISEASE BUT ALSO, AS CHAIRMAN OF THIS SUBCOMMITTEE, I HAVE SEEN FIRSTHAND THAT DIABETES-RELATED ILLNESSES ACCOUNT FOR AS MUCH AS 25 PERCENT OF ALL MEDICARE COSTS. IN FACT, NEARLY TEN PERCENT OF MEDICARE BENEFICIARIES HAVE DIABETES.

WITHOUT DETECTION OR PROPER TREATMENT, DIABETES CAN LEAD TO KIDNEY FAILURE, AMPUTATION, NERVE DAMAGE, BLINDNESS, EXTENDED HOSPITALIZATIONS, HEART DISEASE AND STROKES. ANY THING WE CAN DO TO HELP PATIENTS BETTER MANAGE DIABETES WILL LESSEN THE EMOTIONAL STRAINS ON PATIENTS, AS WELL AS THE FINANCIAL STRAINS ON THE MEDICARE PROGRAM.

AT THIS POINT, I WANT TO ACKNOWLEDGE THE LEADERSHIP ROLE OF MS. FURSE -- SHE HAS BEEN ACTIVE IN THE HOUSE DIABETES CAUCUS AND HAS SPONSORED LEGISLATION TO ASSIST DIABETES PATIENTS. I LOOK FORWARD TO WORKING WITH HER ON THIS VERY IMPORTANT ISSUE.

IN JANUARY, I JOINED MR. THOMAS OF CALIFORNIA AND MR. **CARDIN** OF MARYLAND IN SPONSORING H.R. 15, THE MEDICARE PREVENTIVE BENEFITS IMPROVEMENT ACT OF 1997. THIS LEGISLATION WILL ENSURE THAT IMPORTANT, SOMETIMES EVEN LIFE-SAVING PREVENTIVE BENEFITS WILL BE COVERED BY THE MEDICARE PROGRAM.

OUR BILL GUARANTEES MEDICARE COVERAGE FOR SOME OF THE MOST CRITICAL PREVENTIVE SCREENING TESTS AVAILABLE. THESE TESTS INCLUDE MAMMOGRAPHIES, PAP SMEARS, COLON CANCER SCREENING, PROSTATE SCREENING AND DIABETES SELF-MANAGEMENT.

I FIRMLY BELIEVE THAT H.R. 15 WILL SAVE LIVES -AND MONEY IN THE LONG RUN. IN FACT, THE CONGRESSIONAL BUDGET OFFICE SAID LAST YEAR THAT THE COVERAGE OF SUCH SERVICES COULD ACTUALLY SAVE MEDICARE MONEY.

THE REASON IS SIMPLE: IF DISEASES SUCH AS CANCER CAN BE DETECTED AND TREATED BEFORE THEY BECOME LIFE-THREATENING, TREATMENT OPTIONS MAY BE INCREASED AND HEALTH CARE EXPENDITURES WILL BE LOWER THAN IF THEY HAD NOT.

THE NATIONAL CANCER INSTITUTE ESTIMATES THAT OVER \$100 BILLION IS SPENT EACH YEAR ON CANCER-RELATED EXPENSES. THEREFORE, WE HAVE EXPANDED THE RANGE OF SERVICES COVERED UNDER MEDICARE THROUGH OUR BILL.

WITH MORE AND MORE PEOPLE REACHING RETIREMENT AGE EVERY DAY, WE SIMPLY MUST TAKE STEPS TO REDUCE LONG TERM HEALTH EXPENSES. THE MEDICARE IMPROVEMENT ACT DOES THAT. IT IS GOOD LEGISLATIVE POLICY AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, IT WILL SAVE LIVES.

AGAIN, I WELCOME OUR WITNESSES AND LOOK FORWARD TO HEARING THEIR VALUABLE INSIGHTS ON THIS IMPORTANT ISSUE.